

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PEKING 0349

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SUBJECT: MADAME MAO ATTENDS SINO- AMERICAN BASKETBALL GAME

1. HIGH RANKING LEADERS OF THE PRC, MOST NOTICEABLY THE TOP LEFTISTS TURNED OUT IN FORCE FOR THE FIRST SINO- AMERICAN BASKETBALL GAMES IN PEKING JUNE 19. I WAS GREETED AT THE GYMNASIUM BY CHIANG CH' ING, YAO WEN- YAN, LI HSIEN- NIEN, LI TE- SHENG, AND WANG HUNG- WEN AMONG A HOST OF OTHERS INCLUDING VICE FOREIGN MINISTER CH' IAO KUAN- HUA AND RANKING PRC SPORTS OFFICIAL, WAN MENG. MADAME MAO, NEATLY ATTIRED IN A GREY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT LENGTH DRESS WITH WHITE SHOES AND MATCHING PURSE WAS MOST WELCOMING TO ALL THE VISITING TEAM LEADERS AT TEA BEFORE THE GAME. SHE ASKED THE COACHES AND ME TO CONVEY HER BEST WISHES TO PRESIDENT AND MRS. NIXON, DR. KISSINGER AND SECRETARY ROGERS, ADDING THAT THE AMERICAN LEADERS HAD BEEN BRAVE ENOUGH TO COME AND SEE FOR THEMSELVES THAT THE CHINESE WERE NOT " FREAKS AND MONSTERS". PRAISING SPORTS AS A VEHICLE FOR INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP, SHE TOLD THE SWIMMING COACH THAT SHE HAD SLIPPED OUT OF A MEETING TWO NIGHTS BEFORE TO WATCH THE SWIMMERS TRAIN AND THEN HAD RETURNED TO THE MEETING WHICH " LASTED UNTIL DAWN".

2. YAO WEN- YAN, WHO HAS ALWAYS IN THE PAST BEEN CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT WHEN AMERICANS WERE AROUND, MADE A POINT OF CHIMING IN AT THIS JUNCTURE TO SAY HOW HAPPY HE WAS THAT THE SINO- AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP WAS DEVELOPING, AND HOW IMPORTANT SPORTS WERE IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS. HE DISPLAYED SOME KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH, CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVING FULL COMMAND OF THE TERMS FOR BASKETBALL AND TABLE TENNIS, AND APPEARED TO UNDERSTAND SOME OF WHAT HAD BEEN SAID IN ENGLISH BEFORE THE INTERPRETATION. HE WAS RELAXED AND SMILING THROUGHOUT THE EVENING. WANG HUNG- WEN MADE

POLITE REMARKS DURING THE HALF TO USLO OFFICERS WHO ACCOMPANIED ME.

3. DURING THE GAMES, MADAME MAO, WHO SAT NEXT TO ME, MADE QUITE SPONTANEOUS GESTURES OF FRIENDSHIP TO THE VISITING TEAMS. PRESENTED WITH SOUVENIR EMBLEM PINS BY THE BASKETBALL AND SWIMMING TEAM LEADERS,

AND HAVING NOTHING SIMILAR WITH WHICH TO RECIPROCATE, SHE FISHED IN HER POCKET AND BROUGHT OUT A HANDKERCHIEF FULL OF JASMINE PETALS. SHE ASKED ME TO DIVIDE THE PETALS INTO TWO EQUAL PILES AND PRESENT ONE TO THE GIRLS OF EACH TEAM, SO THAT THEY COULD MAKE TEA OR PORRIDGE. HEARING THE HEAD OF THE BASKETBALL DELEGATION EXPRESS AN INTEREST IN OPERA, SHE INVITED HIS TEAM TO ATTEND A SPECIAL PREVIEW SHOWING OF TWO NEW PEKING OPERAS THE NEXT NIGHT. SHE INCLUDED THE SWIMMERS IN THE INVITATION, ASKING THEM TO STAY ANOTHER DAY IN PEKING TO ATTEND. SHE SAID LAUGHINGLY THAT SHE WOULD NOT INVITE ME BECAUSE SHE DID NOT HANDLE FOREIGN POLICY AND WORRIED THAT HER NEIGHBORS TO THE NORTH WOULD SCOLD US BOTH. I WOULD HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO SEE THE OPERAS LATER, SHE SAID.

3. MADAME MAO WATCHED THE GAMES WITH INTEREST AND GOOD HUMOR, TAKING DELIGHT IN THE VICTORIES OF BOTH THE AMERICAN MEN AND THE CHINESE WOMEN. SHE WORRIED GOOD NATUREDLY TO ME ABOUT THE UNREMITTING DOURNESS OF THE BASKETBALL DELEGATION LEADER WHO SAT ON HER RIGHT HOPING THAT THE VICTORY OF THE CHINESE GIRLS HAD NOT "MADE HIM TENSE". SHE ALSO DISPLAYED A KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH IN EXCHANGES WITH THE USLO OFFICER WHO INTERPRETED FOR ME.

4. COMMENT: I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THE LONG MEETING JUNE 17 THAT MADAME MAO MENTIONED HAD ANY LINK WITH DEVELOPEMENTS TONIGHT. CLEARLY, HOWEVER, AN IMPORTANT TOP LEVEL DISCUSSION, WHICH IN ITSELF IS A SIGNIFICANT MATTER, HAS BEEN UNDERWAY. IN ANY CASE, THE ATTENDANCE OF MADAME MAO, YAO, AND WANG TRANSFORMED THIS INTERNATIONAL SPORTS SHOW INTO A MAJOR POLITICAL EVENT, WITH IMPORTANT DOMESTIC IMPLICATIONS. MEDIA COVERAGE HAS BEEN PROMINENT (THE GAMES WERE TELEVISED LIVE) AND WILL DEMONSTRATE TO THE CHINESE THAT ALL THE LEFTISTS, INCLUDING YAO WEN- YUAN, CONFIDENTIAL

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FULLY SUPPORT THE NEW RELATIONSHIP AT ITS CURRENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT. THE LEADERSHIP IS AT LAST UNITED ON WHAT HAS LONG BEEN A DIVISIVE SUBJECT, THIS, OF COURSE, IS THE MESSAGE FOR US AS WELL.
BRUCE

CONFIDENTIAL

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